WASHINGTONIAN

Advertisement

NEWS & POLITICS

Trump Still Wants to Paint the Eisenhower Building White. Preservationists Are Still Fighting It.

The latest in the lawsuit over Trump's plan for the EEOB.

WRITTEN BY JULIANN VENTURA | PUBLISHED ON OCTOBER 21, 2026



Photo by Evy Mages.

Listen to audio version of this article

Instaread

Less than a week after the Trump administration published an environment assessment acknowledging that painting the Eisenhower Executive Office Building white would damage the 138-year-old landmark, the administration has still not abandoned the plan, according to a court filing late yesterday.

The 129-page environmental review, released Friday, came following months of pushback against Trump's desire—announced in November—to make the building look more like the White House. Within days of his announcement, Cultural Heritage Partners and the DC Preservation League filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia to ensure the project complies with federal laws—such as the National Historic Preservation Act and National Environmental Policy Act—aimed at protecting historic sites and landmarks.

"The president wants a pure white building," Greg Werkheiser, a founding partner at Cultural Heritage Partners and lawyer in the lawsuit, said in a statement, raising concerns that the building would be under constant painting and cleaning due to its size. "He would be trading 150 years of architectural integrity for an expensive, never-ending maintenance project."

The battle over the EEOB comes amid a string of drawn-out renovations and beautification projects around DC sparked by the Trump administration. The projects, which include a botched initial facelift for the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool as well as a Kennedy Center makeover that has faced legal hurdles, have drawn significant scrutiny from preservation and environmental advocacy groups and raised questions over executive overreach.

The administration and preservationist groups have been locked in a legal back-and-forth over the plan to paint the building, which is estimated to cost $7.5 million. In response to the initial lawsuit, the General Services Administration, the federal agency typically responsible for federal real estate, had reportedly agreed not to alter the building through early 2026.

Following this pause, however, the Trump administration announced that the Office of the Administration, which is part of the Executive Office of the President, would be overseeing the project rather than the General Services Administration, which effectively creates a loophole for the administration to sidestep certain review procedures. Soon after, the administration said it would move ahead with an initial paint test, sounding the alarm for the preservationist groups, which filed an emergency motion to halt it. In a court hearing in August, Judge Dabney L. Friedrich ruled that the administration could continue testing but that both parties are required to jointly update her on the status of the project every 14 days.

In the joint update submitted late last night, the administration in a short response said it is continuing to study how the paint would affect the building's granite as well as soliciting public comment until November 16.

In a statement to *Washingtonian*, White House spokesperson Davis Ingle said that Trump has "legal authority to modernize, renovate, and beautify the White House complex—just like all of his predecessors did." He added that "President Trump's bold vision is ensuring the People's House and our Nation's Capital will be properly glorified and remain in excellent condition for generations to come," and mentioned a repeated claim by Trump officials that certain landmarks have been damaged by vandals.

The plaintiffs' response, meanwhile, is much more detailed and critical, arguing that the administration's own assessment from last week undermines its plans, and that there is a way for the building to maintain preservation without painting it. They also, among other concerns, question why the Office of the Administration is overseeing the project rather than the GSA, National Park Service, or other federal agency, claiming that the OA's position creates hurdles for obtaining certain records through the Freedom of Information Act.

Related

Judge Asks DOJ Lawyers: Should I Believe Trump About His East Potomac Plans?

Meanwhile, Cultural Heritage Partners in the past several weeks has been organizing more than a thousand advocacy groups and tribal nations in an effort to protect Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a 60-year-old federal law that requires federal agencies to consider the impact of their projects on historic sites and other significant landmarks.

Since the end of August, the coalition, called 106 Strong, has sent two letters urging Congress to protect the law and block the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act, a permitting reform bill introduced in the US Senate that the group says would substantially overhaul Section 106 by narrowing what constitutes negative impacts and limiting public consultation, among other concerns. When Congress returns on November 9, the group plans to hold a rally outside the US Capitol urging lawmakers to reject the legislation, which the Senate is set to vote on that day.

MORE: EISENHOWER EXECUTIVE OFFICE BUILDING

Join the conversation!



Juliann Ventura

Advertisement